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ABSTRACT

The paper briefly outlines the current status of adult education literature, shows some trends, indicates what is needed, and offers some suggestions on how to meet these needs. The current literature in the field falls into three general categories: published books and pamphlets, fugitive documents, and periodicals. Based on a study of documents acquired by the ERIC Clearinghouse in Adult Education in 1970, tables show the breakdown of documents by intended audience, by subjects, by types of documents, types of articles in adult education for 25 years, and queries received by ERIC/AE in 1972. The final section of the paper discusses the current needs in the field of adult education. Major efforts are needed in the areas of research and dissemination of materials. Recommendations for the Commission of Professors of Adult Education include: (1) more topical bibliographies, (2) interpretive literature reviews, and (3) curriculum materials reviews. (Author/MW)

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THE LITERATURE IN ADULT EDUCATION: A REVIEW REPORT

A paper presented to the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., November 3, 1974, Miami, Florida

by

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THE LITERATURE IN ADULT EDUCATION: A REVIEW REPORT

Like Women's Lib, the literature of adult education has come a long way but still has some way to go.

This paper will briefly outline what is the current status of adult education literature, show some trends, indicate what is needed, and offer some suggestions on how to meet these needs.

WHERE IT'S AT NOW

Typical documents. There are several ways of approaching a review of the adult education literature. One way is to begin by pointing out the kinds of publications which embody the current literature in the field Quite simply, this can be done by using three general categories: published material in the form of books and pamphlets; fugitive documents; and periodicals.

Published books and pamphlets. Commercially published material is still very scant in adult education by comparison with other areas of education. There are only a handful of publishers that produce adult education material on a more-or-less regular basis. Among these are Association Press, Gulf Publications, and Prentice Hall. The only area of adult education where there is a considerable amount of commercially published material is adult basic education, and most of that is curriculum material.

In addition to commerically published material there is a tricle of books coming from non-profit sources. Among these are the Syracuse University Publications in Continuing Education, The Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., NAPCAE, and the ERIC Clearinghouse in Career Education (which succeeded the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education).

Fugitive documents. There is an ever increasing amount of so-called fugitive literature in adult education -- the kind of literature that's not readily available through normal publication channels. The amount of this kind of literature has been dramatically demonstrated since the establishment of the ERIC system which has as its function the collection and processing of such information through its system.

One of the most noticieable increases in quantity of literature is in the area of research reports. Copeland and Grabowski (J), DeCrow (2), and Grabowski (9) have reported on the improvement in adult education research.

The quality of research in adult education has improved also. If the 1974 Adult Education Research Conference (Chicago) is any indication of the quality of research, one must say that it equals that of other areas of education. The papers presented at that conference were, as a whole, exceptionally good. If one were to judge the field of adult education by those papers, the verdict would be that adult education has "arrived" as a major field of professionalization and needs no apologies by comparison with other fields.

Included in the research in adult education is the area of dissertations. The most recent five to seven years have been especially productive numerically, and happily show a sharp improvement in quality particularly in research design and analysis of data. (5,8,9).

Besides research reports and dissertations, there are numberous other kinds of fugitive documents in adult education, such as conference reports, speeches, and monographs. More of these kinds of documents are finding their way into ERIC as individuals recognize the usefulness of disseminating such documents to a wider audience.

Periodicals. There are a few dozen major periodicals in adult education published in the English language both here and abroad. In addition, there are literally hundreds (over 400 by count) of newsletters of varied content, approach, format and quality. Economic pressures have forced some cutbacks in periodical publications, but they seem to have been able to hold their own plateau for a considerable time.

Documents by Categories. Another way to view the literature in adult education is to consider the audiences, the subjects of the documents, and types of documents, Table 1 . shows the breakdown of documents by intended audience, the result of a study DeCrow made of documents acquired by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education in 1970. (3).

Table 1

DOCUMENTS ACQUIRED BY ERIC/AE 1970

Intended Audience	Percent of total documents
Adult Education Profession in General	10
University Community	36
Public School Adult Educators	20
Trainers in Business and Industry	17
Cooperative Extension	4
Religious Organizations	4
Coluntary Organizations	7
Labor Unions	2
Junior Colleges	2

Table 2 Shows a breakdown by subjects of documents input into Research in Education by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education in 1972. Table 3 shows a breakdown by type of documents in the same survey. (10)

Table 2

ERIC/AE RIE INPUT 1972

BY SUBJECTS	Percentage
Business Ed	25
Correctional Institutions & Law Enforcement	17
ABE	16
Military	11
University Extension	6
Professional Continuing Ed	5
Volunteers	5
Consumer Ed	5
Counseling	5
Adult Learning	5

Table 3

ERIC/AE RIE INPUT 1972

BY TYPE OF DOCUMENT	Percentage
Research reports	34
Manuals	32
Program descriptions	16
Papers	8
Conference reports	6
Bibliographies	4

Table 4 reports types of articles in Adult Education. (7)

Table 4

TYPES OF ARTICLES IN ADULT EDUCATION FOR 25 YEARS

Type of Article	Percentage of Total
Personal Beliefs or Experience	28.8
Program Description	25.2
Empirical Research	22.6
Formal Philosophy	5.6
Interpretive Literature Reviews	4.8
Techniques of Practice	4.8
Theoretical Formulation	3.3
History	3.1
Other	1.8
Total	100.0

This is what the recent picture of adult education literature looks like. That is what is available, but the next question must be how much is this literature used?

In the case of published books the answer must be that not very much use is made becasue there is only a limited circulation of these books. However, there is an ever increasing use made of fugitive documents made available through ERIC as all surveys of ERIC usage indicate. Periodicals have leveled off in circulation, and presumably have not increased the number of people reading them.

The rather limited use of adult education literature prompts one to ask why more use is not made of the existing literature. Several answers come quickly to mind. Among these are:

1. Practitioners and others are not aware of the existence of much of the literature. They don't know that it exists, or where to look for it, or where to get it, despite the existence of ERIC for more than seven years.

2. Much of the literature does not meet the practitioner's needs. Either the topics and subjects covered in the literature are irrelevant, or they take the wrong approach or wrong format.

A study of queries submitted to ERIC/AE over a one year period ending December 1972 revealed that the queries did not match the imput in Research in Education.

Table 5 shows a breakdown of the queries received by ERIC/AE in 1972. (10)

Table 5

QUERIES RECEIVED BY ERIC/AE IN 1972

Subject Category	Percentage
Cross cultural training	13.0
Special degrees (correspondence, Open Univ.)	10.5
Adult basic education	9.0
Education of/for women (returning to college)	8.5
Ethnic, languages, etc.	5.1
Adult learning (self-concept)	5.1
Corredtional institutions	5.1
Mass media	5.0
Financing, costs, cost-benefit	5.0
Business and industry	4.3
Staff development	4.3
Continuing education in the professions	4.0
Counseling	3.0
Family life, parent education, consumer ed.	3.0
Aging	2.5
Community services	2.4
All other areas	10.2

3. Practitioners are not professionals for the most part in the field of adult education. Many of them are part-timers, or moonlighters from other areas of education who do not have the interest, motivation or commitment to search the literature. Their lack of professionalization is one of the greatest drawbacks in the field.

WHAT IS NEEDED

What can we do to change the situation as it exists at present? I suppose there are many suggestions one might make, but I have zeroed in on three areas that require our attention simultaneously and immediately.

The first of these is to try to match the needs in the field with what is being studied through research. There seem to be some researchers who are involved in what they call "pure research" meaning that they are doing what they would like to do, regardless of whether it is useful to anyone. These researchers claim that research does not depend on whether the findings are to be used; all that counts is that they work on the explorations of knowledge.

Other researchers are pushing their own "wheels" over and over again. Professors have been accused of falling into this category to the point that they "direct" the research of many of their doctoral students into the same channels.

Both the "pure researchers" and the professors pushing their wheels go on their merry way while the practitioners are still beset with their problems, still looking for someone to find answers for them. The studies reported in table 2 and 5 show that there is no coordination of efforts in adult education research to meet the needs of practitioners.

Perhaps what is needed is some concerted effort on our part to identify the areas needing research. In 1956 Burton W. Kreitlow (12) reported the results of a major effort to identify needed research in adult education and in 1970 Roger DeCrow, as part of a Status Study for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education inventoried the research needs of adult education. What both of these studies reported as research needs, are still essentially valid even today. However, the specific thrusts of some of these general needs may have changed somewhat and new needs not mentioned in the two studies have emerged.

The second need is for better dissemination of existing innovative materials as well as future materials. The problem of dissemination of innovation is not indigenous to adult education alone, but that is small comfort. Several individuals and groups have addressed themselves to this problem in recent months.

Several HEW Region Staff Development Projects conducted conferences on this subject, and a symposium will be given at the Adult Education Research Conference in St. Louis next spring.

Gary Darkwald and Harold Beder did a study in which they looked at the dissemination of several project results in ABE. Their findings bear out the need for devising some kind of strategies to get such innovative demonstration project results disseminated more widely and effectively. (6)

The third need seems to be for long range training of teachers of adults so that they might become more professionalized. Hopefully the kind of preservice and inservice training they would receive would include a familiarity with the literature and how to keep up with it.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMISSION

Whatever the Commission of Professors of Adult Education is able to effect in the three foregoing needs may be a far-reaching goal requiring the assistance of others. But, I think, there are several ways in which the commission -- both as a body and as individuals -- can help to do immediately.

One of my recommedations is for more topical bibliographies. When I use the word bibliography I mean something more than a laundry list of titles. The usefulness of a bibliography depends on how much useful information it can give the reader. I would consider an annotation of brief abstract as a "must."

The ERIC Clearinghouse in Career Education at Norther Illinois University in Dekalb produces such basic bibliographies with the minimum amount of abstract and citation. These are good and useful as far as they go. But I would propose that we need something in addition to what a computer search can yield. We desperately need the kinds of bibliography John Ohliger is famous for -- a bibliography which pulls together the kind of material ERIC can generate plus other material from related sources. Besides, Ohliger added some kind of organization to his bibliography which reflected a kind of direction so necessary for an individual to plow through extensive citations.

Another kind of bibliography Ohliger developed is the "quotational bibliography," which I call "abstracts with extracts." This device not only gives the overall contents of the document but quotes one or several significant paragraphs which give the which give the author's sense of the document.

Ohliger's bibliographies on Freire and on Compulsory Adult Education are examples of what I mean. Both, incidentally, are in the ERIC system.

Interpretive Literature Reviews. There is a great need for literature on several levels. I'm talking about something besides comprehensive, retrospective state-of-the-art reports. These are of course, urgently needed, but they will be rather infrequent. What I am suggesting is something simpler and more current.

For example, I think we could use some "sweep reviews" -- quick tours through current literature organized as a guide for depth analysis of subparts. This is what many of the reviews ERIC/AE published. They were meant mostly for researchers and the more sophisticated practitioners. We need these kinds of reviews to serve as the base for other materials designed especially for the practitioner.

Two years ago, at the A.E.A. conference, Paul Sheats raised the question whether we ought not think about a two-step process in translating research findins into practice. He said that there are two competencies that are required to make this translation and that very rarely does one individual possess both.

One competency is that of being knowledgeable with research and research methodology to be able to take a large corpus of literature and put it into some kind of order. This would result in a document more for the researcher and "middle person" who would translate it for the practitioner. The other competency would be in the direction of understanding the needs of the practiontioner, and indeed being conversant with the language of the practioner, while still having a grasp of research language to be able to take what the research reviewer put together and prepare into a digest. The digest would be nothing more than boiling out the best and relevant materials form the sweep reviews but still going into some depth.

The third kind of review would be very simple, brief -- no more than 20 pages -- using easy language understood by the part-time practioner of adult education who has not had any formal professional training. This is the kind of document that a practitioner could read and put into practice immediatley in the very next class. This is a difficult task, and many profesors are reluctant to undertake such writing either because they do not have the writing skills required to do a good job, or else they see no "academic brownie points" for doing it. But this is what the practitioners desperately need and beg us to give them.

Reviewing Curriculum Materials. My third recommendation is for pulling together and critically reviewing curriculum materials, including a multimedia approach. At the moment, the ERIC system does not include curriculum materials. This may change very shortly as the ERIC system's monthly abstract catalog, Research in Education changes its name to Resources in Education next January. Maybe the name change will allow ERIC/CICE to include curriculum materials in its monthly input into the system.

On this last point, I want to commend the ERIC CLearinghouse on Career Education on the splendid job it has performed since taking over the adult education function last year. I know that there have been some criticisms of ERIC/CICE's handling of adult education materials, but I think the criticism has been unwarranted and unfair. Just before coming to this conference, I had studied the entire input of ERIC/CICE since it took over up to this moment. I am happy to report to you that they have almost equalled the number of adult education documents input into ERIC as compared with the average annual input of ERIC/AE in its last two years of operation.

If you want to know what a herculean job David Tiedeman has done to accomplish this, you ought to know that his total budget is about equal to the budget of one of the clearinghouses before the merger, where he has in effect three clearinghouses under his scope. With inflationary prices, it means that he is performing as well as each of the separate clearinghouses were able to do but for less than one-half of the combined budgets.

The Montclaire Multimedia Center in ABE, now called the Adult Education Clearinghouse, has been collecting curriculum materials for the past four years and providing an abstract service. Part of their abstract service is a low level review of applicability of materials. What they provide is isome indication of audiences the material is directed at.

If you were to press me to tell you what I see as topics needing immediate attention I would probably say the following: We need sweep reports in needs of urban areas, in continuing education in the professions, especially health care delivery; and continuing education of women. In addition, I would see a need for all kinds of reviews in the following areas: planning and coordinating adult education (larger levels of policy-making); personnel development in adult education (staff development); mass media; community development; special degree programs for adults; correctional institutions and law enforcement;

and the whole gig of adult learning environments, systems and facilities (the domain of the AEA commission bearing the same title.)

There you have it. The picture is bright in some respects -- the kind of literature we are getting is better -- but disappointing in other respects reflected in the great unmet needs.

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